CHRONICLE AND COMMENT

By ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

TWO books of the season that recall two very vital and amiable figures of American literary life are "The Letters of James Gibbons Huneker" (Charles Scribner's Sons) and Delmar Gross Cooke's "William Dean Howells; a Critical Study" (E. P. Dutton & Co.). It is interesting to consider the subjects of the two books side by side. A greater contrast would be difficult to find. On the one hand, Howells, in whom the puritanism of the New England in which he spent so much of his young manhood was grafted on the even narrower puritanism of the middle West of his birth. On the other, Huneker, the joyous Bohemian, the frequenter of queer haunts, the quaffer of Pilsener. Yet far apart as they were in outward aspect the esteem and affection in which each was held in life and is remembered after death, were much the same. Each had that finest of attributes; the true politeness of the heart.

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THE Scribner publication purports to present "The Letters of James Gibbons Huneker." They are nothing of the kind. They are "Jim" Huneker's letters, which is a very different thing and very much more worth while. Men who worked with him, or played with him, or who over tables in Moulds's in University Place, or Luchow's in Fourteenth street, or in a bierhalle in Munich, or a cafe of the Paris left bank discussed with him Wagner or Baudelaire are thinking and speaking of them as "Jim's letters." "Jim" fitted him much better than James. That stamps the man. Imagine any one thinking of a posthumously printed volume of the letters of Mr. Howells as "Bill's letters!" Can any one recall a letter of Thackeray's bearing signature other than the familiar "W. M. Thackeray"? Not even in the correspondence with Jane Octavia Brookfield. Did Dickens ever sign himself "Charlie"? Poe was "Eddie" in letters to his mother-in-law, Mrs. Clemm. But Huneker was "Jim" to his intimates, just as O. Henry was "Bill."

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ON the occasion of his first visit to New York many years ago Mr. Howells visited Pfaff's beer cellar, at Broadway and Bleecker street, a famous gathering place of the literati of the late '60s and early '70s. Shy and shocked he sat amid the revel and clinking of glasses, and later penned a description of the scene "In a manner," says Mr. Cooke, "somewhat foreign to his gentle and tolerant nature." Revelry in any form had little place in his life and work. His hardest written pages were those that savored of mild impropriety. In one scene of "The Rise of Silas Lapham" he pictured Bartley Hubbard, a seasoned newspaper man, becoming helplessly intoxicated on two Scotch highballs, which was hardly the realism that Mr. Howells professed. The hero of one of his short stories sees a piano case having on it the name and address of a young woman. He concludes she may have been a little girl he once saw running barefooted. The fancied identification of the young woman with the child whose active brown legs he distinctly remembers brings the hot blushes to the hero's cheeks.

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IMAGINE the hero of a Huneker story succumbing to two Scotch highballs or ducking beneath the bed covers to hide the blushes evoked by the memory of a little girl's brown legs! In that idea you see the men poles apart. But who can say that one had a greater humanity than the other? Beneath Mr. Howells's "niceness" there was always a broad tolerance. Even when he could not quite see the other man's point of view he was ready to concede that there must be a justification for it. Possessing charity, there was nothing of the aggressive reformer about him. With what gentle modesty he bore his honors of later life as the dean of American letters. Toiling till the end, he commanded admiration and esteem by the amount and quality of his work; while his invariable courtesy and consideration won for him the love of those who were approximately of his own age and the reverent affection of those of a younger generation who were privileged to know him.

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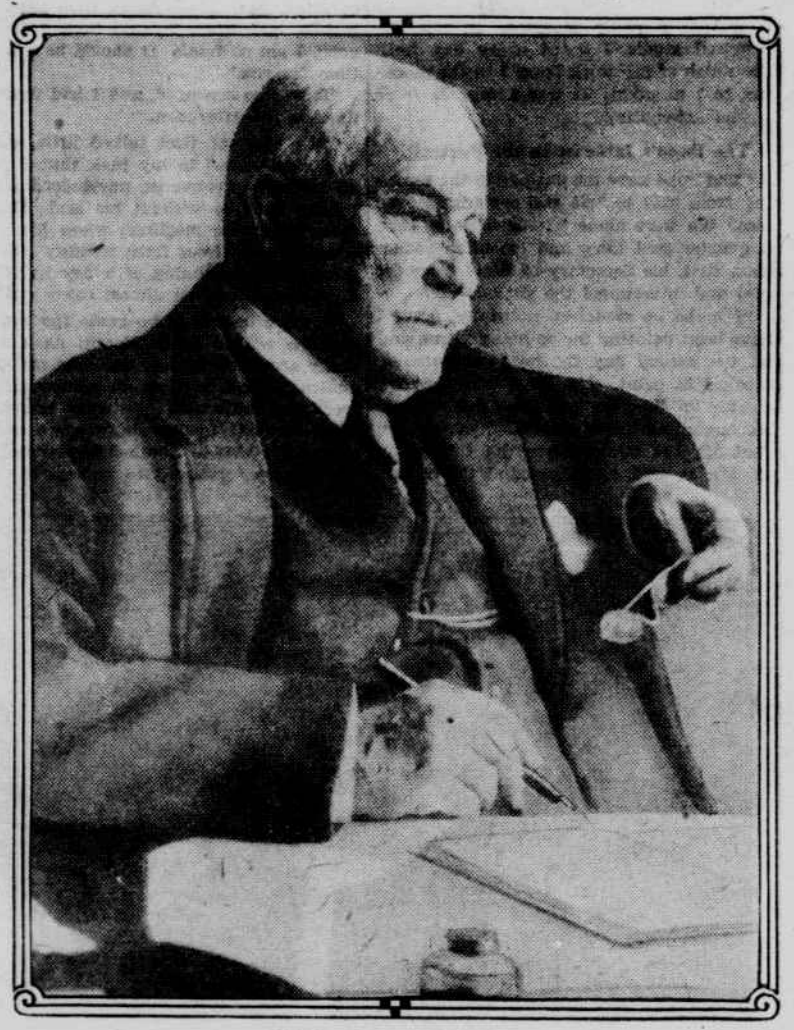
BOTH Howells and Huneker were generous in encouragement of the man who was struggling up in the literary game. In fact there was a time when captious critics were finding fault with Mr. Howells for discovering too much genius that often turned out to be only respectable mediocrity. There was a different tone to James Huneker's letters of encouragement. Each man was gracious in his own style. For example, Huneker in writing to Walter Pritchard Eaton in March, 1905, said in part: "I don't see why you so persistently sport the monocle of pessimism. You are young, gifted and your style is personal. I am to-day just past 45; ten years ago, that is in 1895, I was scooping beats for the dramatic columns of the *Recorder*. From 1891 to 1897 I wrote a daily column—The Prompter—said to be, by prominent authorities in the Tenderloin slums, the best of its kind. Some one else got the credit for my work for at least five years—that and all the cash. . . . I was a lofty failure. So you see that *ego in Arcady*. I was a dramatic *hobo-e*. To-day I am a literary *cocotte*. Cheer up, Wallie! Look at Thomas—never the doubting, ever the serene Thomas!"



William Dean Howells.

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HOW both of those men worked! Consider the total production of Mr. Howells in all fields of literary labor. "I've been writing 5,000 words a day," records James Huneker in the course of one of his letters. And this by hand, in a handwriting that was particularly villainous, as possibly the compositor who sets up this paragraph may remember. Robert Louis Stevenson called 2,200 words a day the "labor of an elephant." It is James Huneker, the [illegible] journalist, who is always reflected in the course of these letters. Even the occasional vacation brought little rest. In September, 1920, he writes back from England: "Fancy going 3,000 miles for a vacation and then writing 25,000 words in five weeks. . . . Worse, dodging about London for fresh material. . . . After forty years of penwork I'm still bound in the Ixion wheel of journalism." Again: "I'm writing 100,000 words, fiction, for publication October, 1920. I've finished 50,000 thus far. . . . Allons, courage Jacques le Scribe (Jim the Penman)."

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"HOWELLS'S staggering output" is the way Mr. Cooke expresses his subject's industry and facility, and the bibliography at the end of the volume lists five books of autobiographical interest, eight books of criticism, twenty books containing critical introductions, six books of verse, thirteen books of travel, thirty-six novels, thirteen sketches and stories, twenty-two plays, nineteen miscellaneous works and a selected list of periodical contributions numbering eighty-two. No wonder that he never found the opportunity for the rest that he hoped for; that instead of putting aside the pen at the age of 50, or 60, or 70, he kept himself in harness until the end. Yet there were responsibilities other than those of his writing table. To turn for a moment from Mr. Cooke's book to Caroline Ticknor's 'Glimpses of Authors," discussed in this department last week, we read: "It would seem that Mr. Howells's enormous accomplishment in the field of letters, together with his adherence to the high standard that he set for himself, might have entitled him to a freedom from household duties and responsibilities, yet from the earliest days he cheerfully shouldered more than his share of the domestic burdens. No matter what the demands of his work might be he always had time to devote himself, first to his invalid daughter and then to Mrs. Howells, who for many years was also an invalid demanding constant thought and care."

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TO revert to the Huneker letters. It does not matter much what the signature appended to a particular letter may be; whether it is James Huneker or James Gibbons Huneker, or "Jim," or Jim the Penman, or O. F. which stood for Old Fogy. In the course of the letters, rich in literary reference and keen in criticism, the writer, with a flippancy that is characteristically American, is sure to refer to himself as Little Willie or Your Uncle Dudley. It is his way of informing his correspondent that he does not take himself too seriously. In the same spirit, after a particularly brilliant bit of observation, he apologized for what he calls his "chatter." For example, in one letter to Mr. Brownell, he contrasts Poe and Baudelaire: "Will you take it as an impertinence if I beg you to revise, be it ever so slightly, your belief that Poe was a greater post than Baudelaire? While Poe was far from being Emerson's jingle man, he never struck the profounder chords of passion so marvelously sounded by the wretched Baudelaire. Take down 'Fleurs de Mal' from the shelf and read the tiny masterpiece again. There is all the horror we find in Poe, but also humanity, pathos, sex." That is the beginning of a page and a half of illuminating comparison, dismissed apologetically as "chatter."

Authors' Works And Their Ways

"Timothy's Quest," by Kate Douglas Wiggin, which is still selling steadily, although published over thirty years ago, has now gone on to the screen. The filming was undertaker by the Dirigo Film Company of Portland, Me., who were able to stage the scenes at the very part of country that the author laid the scenes of the story.

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Ralph D. Paine, author of many books of sports and adventure for boys, has now written his own true story under the title of "Roads of Adventure." One among the many thrilling episodes of his life is his famous filibustering expedition with Capt. Dynamite Johnny O'Brien on board the oceangoing tug the Three Friends.

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Among the books on the forthcoming calendar of Nicholas L. Brown is Georg Brandes's "Wolfgang Goethe," translated from the Danish by Allen W. Porterfield. The work will be published in two volumes. The original Danish edition appeared in the autumn of 1916. The German edition (Berlin: Erich Reiss) came out six months ago.

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"Europe in the Middle Ages," by Iernle L. Plunket, is announced by the Oxford University Press American Branch. The author's object has been not so much to supply students with facts as to make medieval Europe live—in the lives of heroes and villains, the tendencies of the classes, the beliefs and prejudices of the thinkers.

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Fast on the announcement that they are to publish an "Outline of Literature and Art" in conjunction with Newnes, the English publishers of the "Outline of Science," comes the announcement from the Putnams that still another Outline is in preparation. This time it is to be an "Outline of Humor," and the author is Carolyn Wells.

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Edward Simmons, in his just published book, "From Seven to Seventy: Memoirs of a Painter and a Yankee," says: "If I had the task of taking to Europe one thing as the best work of art of America, I should take the tomb from the Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, which was created by those three artists—Saint-Gaudens, Stanford White and Henry Adams. Nothing we have made in this country as yet, whether paint, carving, or architecture, can equal it.

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In 1790, when Jane Austen, in her teens, was reading everything she could lay hands on, "best sellers' were an unknown quantity. The fiction Jane knew included Richardson's "Pamela" and "Clarissa Harlowe" (in eight volumes); Fielding's "Tom Jones" and "Amelia," "The Vicar of Wakefield" and Fanny Burney's "Evelina," all of which were published before 1778. It was, however, the sensational romance fashionable in her own day, represented by the works of Ann Radcliffe and Jane Porter, that moved Jane to the mischievous burlesques in her newly published volume "Love and Friendship." This book is now in its second printing.